

Sermon: The Church of Laodicea

Text: Revelation 3:14-22 ESV

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Introduction: We are completing today our tour of the seven churches. We are saving the worst example till last. Laodicea has nothing to commend it to Jesus or the other Asian churches.

Here is a fun fact: “Laodicea was founded by the Seleucid king Antiochus II and named in honor of his wife, Laodice, between his ascension to the throne in 261 B.C. and his divorcing her in 253 B.C. According to the elder Pliny (*HN* 5.105), it was built on the site of an older settlement first called Diospolis and later Rhoas. The name Diospolis (“city of Zeus”) might reflect the fact that Zeus was the chief deity of the place, as he was of Laodicea.” - Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol IV, p. 229

Certainly gods of the various trade guilds and the Caesar of the time were looked at as Lord and Savior by many as they went about their daily lives.

There were many kingdoms that came and went, but Laodicea seemed to always take care of herself and were rewarded handsomely for their faithfulness by Rome. In A.D. 60 a devastating earthquake completely destroyed the town, but again Laodicea was self-sufficient and did not take any offered assistance to rebuild.

Laodicea was known for being a banking and financial center (rich), a textile center that was known for very soft, black wool (quite different from the white robes offered by God), and finally Laodicea was an eye center famous for eye and ear-salve, yet *spiritual* eyes and ears are what is needed.

Firstly, we have:

I. The Identification of Jesus (v. 14)

Revelation 3:14 ESV ¹⁴ “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

A. The words of the Amen

This is certainly a reference to Jesus. Even in the O.T. “amen” was a congregational response to hearing the truth. It is today still a response to Scripture or preaching that is in line with God’s Word.

The Hebrew word from which we get this word in our text and even our word “amen” means truth or announces agreement. Especially in the Gospels we hear Jesus remark “truly, truly” or “verily, verily” I say unto you. So in Jesus’ teaching the affirmation to His teaching *began* with AMEN rather than a response by the people (congregation). And in [John 14:6](#), Jesus, Himself, claims to be the embodiment of TRUTH.

In the New Testament, “truth” is not only about being accurate, but also trustworthy.

In reference to Jesus, the idea of “ruler of creation” (NIV), as we have in some translations, Jesus is the source of all created things and NOT a created being himself (JW, Mormons).

Hear the false distorted translation of the *New (Under)World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*: [John 1:1](#) In [beginning] the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.

B. The faithful and true witness

Quoted in Barclay, p. 177 - “He (Jesus) is this witness on whom we can rely and who is true. R.C. Trench well points out that a witness must satisfy three essential conditions. (a) He must have seen with his own eyes that of which he tells. (b) He must be absolutely honest, so that he repeats with accuracy that which he has heard and seen. (c) He must have the ability to tell what he has to say, so that his witness may make its true impression on those who hear.”

Beale, p. 300 - The LXX of [Isa. 43:10](#) says “ ‘You [Israel] are my witnesses and I am a witness,’ says the Lord, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen.’” Likewise [43:12-13](#) (LXX) is parallel with [43:10](#) and has “ ‘You [Israel] are my witnesses, and I am a witness, ‘says the Lord God, even from the beginning...What is striking here is that Israel, God and the Servant, who we identify as Jesus, are all called “witnesses.”

Now the Church is included in this witnessing and standing up for God/Jesus.

[Acts 1:6-8](#) **ESV** ⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

While Jesus is away, the Church must be His faithful and true witness. Jesus is:

C. The beginning of God’s creation

The Church is made up of those who have heard the Gospel, and obeyed it by faith and repentance, confession and baptism and as a result received the Holy Spirit who empowers them to be faithful and true witnesses - what we call the “new” creation.

II Corinthians 5:14-17 ESV ¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. ¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

II. The Church’s Evaluation (vv. 15-17)

Revelation 3:15-16 ESV ¹⁵ “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

A. Lukewarm (vv. 15-16)

God knows exactly what we think, say and do. He knows our hearts and minds. His desire is that we be deeply committed to him and not a casual friend or acquaintance.

James Strauss comments on this verse: “There can be no real commitment to Jesus Christ and be liturgically cold at the same time.” A.T. Robertson said, “There is no real Christianity without enthusiasm. Yet you do realize there are people who are enthusiastic about a lot of things. But if we have the Truth to share, we ought to be enthusiastic and full of joy!

I am convinced that God may have more respect for those who oppose Him wholeheartedly than those who half-heartedly claim to be His, or are only pretending.

Question: What do you think Jesus means by “lukewarm?”

Answer: complacent, unconcerned, indifferent is what I have heard and read before

Q. What do you expect from water?

Q. What did the woman at the well really want but an encounter with God and living water...

In the area the water was hot, like mineral springs - healing, helpful

Cold can be refreshing and life-giving, but Laodicea’s water was lukewarm after traveling for over 6 miles from its source - no one says give me a lukewarm cup of water or coffee.

This is not an example of hot and cold for their witnessing, because God never wishes we were cold that way. Lukewarm is something undesirable, unexpected and not pleasing.

Though, you see there is no apostasy here, no false doctrine being taught or even put up with - just apathy, which after all is the opposite of love. The opposite of love is not hate necessarily. It may be, in the final analysis, that you just don't care.

Question: What is Jesus' reaction to this apathy by His church?

Answer: **I am about to spit you out of my mouth.** He is about to..., i.e. He will allow for a time to repent and then the action described (spit you out of my mouth) is very graphic. It means vomit. It is a rejection that has disgust connected to it.

B. Spiritually Oblivious (v. 17)

Revelation 3:17 ESV ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

This is probably not the perception they had of each other from a human point of view. They probably had a nice building, little or no debt, had everything they needed.

e.g. In Illinois a few years ago a church was endowed with a sizeable sum of money from oil stocks (I also saw it with fracking in PA). This large trust killed the stewardship program. No one felt they needed to give. They had forgotten the tremendous need outside their four walls.

Laodicea had developed an attitude of self-sufficiency. They could do all things through their effort and resources. They did not depend upon the Lord for anything.

Question: How prosperous, rich can a church become in the context of the poor and hungry (physically)? spiritually? around them and not respond. We must assume that the church was mostly unaware of *their* spiritual condition.

Question: How would most of us react to a critical evaluation of OUR spiritual condition (life)?

Answer: It would have to come from someone we respect and love. Here it comes from Jesus Himself by way of the Apostle John.

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In a water supply are people looking for bitterness and an awful experience or life-giving, refreshing water that saves a person's life?

III. Counsel for the Church (v. 18)

Revelation 3:18 ESV ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

The Counsel is to:

A. Be rich spiritually.

The idea of “gold refined in the fire,” is that it is made better and more valuable by the process. Sometimes difficult times or people make us better. In fact, here, the process makes them *pure* (i.e. this gold does not tarnish and turn green).

I Peter 1:7 ESV ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

There is all kinds of riches, and spiritual ones are the kind God desires for His children.

The idea of rebuke here compels/forces a person to see the error of his ways. Discipline is not a necessary evil. It is a necessary good. It says I care about you.

B. Clothe yourself in righteousness.

Question: What do white clothes represent?

Answer: Purity, being victorious. It certainly is a contrast to the clothes of the physical rich. Only the rich wore dyed clothing. And here, Laodicea was known for black textiles.

Question: What does nakedness mean in **verse 18**?

Answer: No pretense possible, everything exposed. First step to salvation and fellowship with God is the realization of our spiritual nakedness (**Garden of Eden**). We need to be clothed in righteousness, clothed with Christ.

Galatians 3:27 ESV ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (**clothed with Christ**, NIV)

This idea of one’s spiritual nakedness is seen in the Old Testament (See Isaiah 20; II Samuel 10:4; **Ezekiel 16:35-42 ESV**) and Israel is talked about in very unflattering terms.

C. See with spiritual eyes.

John 8:12 ESV ¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 9:4 ESV ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.

John 9:35-41 ESV 35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”[a] 36 He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” 37 Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” 38 He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” 41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt;[b] but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

Footnotes: [a] John 9:35 Some manuscripts the Son of God

[b] John 9:41 Greek you would not have sin

This becomes a commentary not on the synagogue, but the church.

IV. Warning to the Church (v. 19)

Revelation 3:19 ESV 19 Those whom I love, I reprove (*rebuke*, NIV) and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

About 30 years before, Paul and now John had been working with this congregation in Laodicea.

Colossians 4:12-13 ESV 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

A. Accept discipline.

The idea of reproof or rebuke here compels/forces a person to see the error of his ways. Discipline is not a necessary evil. It is a necessary good. It says I care about you. It tries to maintain fellowship, but not at “all” costs. The end result of discipline failing is to have nothing to do with the immoral individual (I Corinthians 5:11, “with such a person do not even eat”) or the divisive person Titus 3:10-11, “have nothing more to do with them”).

Discipline is needed in the home, school, and church. When it is lacking, the quality of these areas suffer; people suffer. And at the end of the day: “It is, in fact, God’s final punishment to leave a man alone.” - Barclay, p. 184 - (See story insert called “The Bat” from *Storytelling, Imagination and Faith* by William J. Bausch, pp. 166-67)

Be earnest, zealous and repent. God wants passionate people.

B. Be zealous.

The Church is to be an uncompromising witness before a lost and dying world. Light is our method of helping them see Jesus. Don't be ashamed of the Gospel. It directs all who will believe in its power and its author.

C. Repent.

Knowledge and information are of no value unless acted upon. Like a theatre that is on fire, one must not only acknowledge the warning of "FIRE!" We must act on it and save ourselves as well as others whom we can convince of the danger.

V. Contingencies for Our Reward (vv. 20-21)

Revelation 3:20-21 ESV ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

A. Jesus speaks, we must hear and obey.

The very first thing that needs to be understood about this verse is the people (audience) to whom it was directed.

Question: To whom was this written?

Answer: The church (at Laodicea), circular letter...This is not addressed to pagans. This is NOT an invitation to accept Christ although some have forced this verse to carry that message.

The Shepherd knows His sheep and his sheep know His voice. **John 10:1-4 ESV** ¹ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

This is addressed to a closed church that no longer invites Jesus, the Head of the Church to even participate in worship and ministry. This is really a dead church. There are corpses in the pews, but the undertaker has not yet been called to make the obvious official.

B. If we obey, Jesus will come in and eat with us.

Question: What does the invitation to eat with the church mean?

Answer: It is a call to intimacy. A German request during the Lord's Supper is: "Lord, Come eat with us."

There is also the picture in the New Testament of a Judge standing at the door. [James 5:8-9 ESV](#) 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

Even though Christ has the power to open or shut a door in [Revelation 3:7](#). It is the Christian here through repentance that may open to the Christ the door of his heart.

C. If we conquer Satan, we will reign with Jesus.

With God's love, help and discipline we will share in Christ's victory (over death) and reign with Him and all those who are faithful.

[Romans 8:16-17 ESV](#) 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Beale, p. 309 "Christ promises that if those in the church overcome pressures to accommodate to idolatry (*culture*) and resist taking a low profile in their witness, they will inherit a ruling position with him. If they overcome the same temptations to compromise their "faithful witness" *that Jesus overcame* they will be granted a ruling position in the messianic kingdom."

Conclusion: [Revelation 3:22 ESV](#) 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Apathy or indifference to life with Jesus will eventually produce spiritual suicide. This is a self-inflicted death because God is always available if we will only care enough to listen and accept His offer of peace and eternal life. This uncalled-for ending is the result of neglecting a relationship with God and others, and only thinking of yourself. Later, as this attitude worsens, you don't even care about yourself. And you were made in the *image of God*, the Creator.

Finally, the letter to Laodicea is a call to witness - not just for them to accept, but also for us.